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Fathi M. Ihmeideh
Hashemite University, Jordan

Aieman Ahmad Al-Omari
Hashemite University, Jordan

Kholoud A. Al-Dababneh
Hashemite University, Jordan

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Attitudes toward Communication Skills among Students'-Teachers' in Jordanian Public Universities

Fathi M. Ihmeideh, Ph.D.
Aieman Ahmad AL-OMARI, Ph.D.
Kholoud A. Al-Dababneh, Ph.D.
Hashemite University, Jordan
aieman66@hotmail.com
<mailto:aieman66@hu.edu.jo>

Abstract: The present study was carried out to determine the positive and negative attitudes among 289 students of class teachers and childhood teachers' disciplines using the communication skills attitude scale (CSAS) in Jordanian public universities. GPA, year level of students were recorded. Overall results of study revealed that the mean of positive attitude score was 4.03. The mean of negative attitude scale score was 3.63. There were no significant differences between class teachers and childhood teachers students in their positive and negative attitudes toward communication skills. Students with grade point averages 2 and more have positive attitudes toward communication skills than students with grade point average less than 2. Senior students have high positive and less negative attitudes toward communication skills than sophomore and junior students.

Introduction

Teachers need excellent communication skills to succeed in their profession. Listening, interpersonal, written and oral communication skills are required by teachers to facilitate understanding of teaching findings and the ability to accomplish their responsibilities effectively. Teachers are constantly gathering, sorting, analyzing and explaining information to learners. Not only do teachers need to accomplish technical tasks, they must also communicate efficiently and effectively with internal and external customers.

Development of effective communication skills is an important part of teachers' advancement potential. Teachers must possess highly developed communication skill levels to become a successful professional. The development of these skills not only enhances the teachers' potential, but will also improve the quality of teachers produced. Advanced communication skills are required in every aspect of the teaching process. Teachers must possess highly developed oral and writing skills to communicate with management, learners and co-workers effectively.

Open communication lines will minimize the potential of ill feelings during the teaching process. The next step is to carefully listen before responding to what the other person is communicating. Defensiveness needs to be avoided in the teaching process. Loss (2000) recommends utilizing positive statements, rather than accusatory statements, when communicating. Also, Rees & Garrud (2001) suggested that older, mature students have high positive attitudes toward communication skills training.

Employers maintain that graduates need training in such topics as speaking and listening (Mayes, Weldey, & Icenogle, 1997), persuasion techniques and conflict management (Reinsch & Shelby, 1997), and interpersonal communication (Golen, Catanach, & Moeckel, 1997). In a synthesis of literature on entry-level employees, Tanyel and Mitchell (1999) report a litany of communication abilities expected by employers, including written communication, oral communication, leadership communication, team skills, presentation skills, global/cultural awareness, and interpersonal communication.

The American Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills report (SCANS, 1992) identified interpersonal skills and basic communication skills, including speaking and listening, as two of eight essential competencies necessary for success in the workplace. Interpersonal skills were defined as the ability to work on teams, teach others, serve customers, lead, negotiate, and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Subsequently, North and Worth (2004) found that interpersonal skills were the most frequently mentioned competency required in entry level job ads from newspapers in 10 metropolitan areas. Eighty percent of ads noted that candidates should have strong interpersonal skills. Similarly, they found 49% of entry-level advertisement included requirements for basic skills related to communication, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Further evidence suggests that employers in all occupational fields place greater value on employees' communication skills than they do on their technical skills (California State University, 2000; McPherson, 1998; Maes, Weldy & Icenogle, 1997; Reinsch & Shelby, 1997, 1996; Plutsky, 1996).

Several studies have found correlations between employees' communication skills and supervisors' perceptions of job performance (Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997; Scudder & Guinan, 1989). Oral communication is consistently identified both as the most important competency in evaluating entry-level job candidates (Maes et al., 1997) and as the most critical attribute for managerial success (Seymour, 1989). Numerous studies have compared leaders with non-leaders to determine distinguishing characteristics of leaders. Analyses of these studies indicate that the majority of the distinguishing characteristics of leaders involve social and interpersonal skills, including social nearness and friendliness, group task supportiveness, cohesion and teamwork, emotional balance and control, nurturant behavior, and verbal fluency (Al-Omari, Abu Tinhe, & Khasawneh, 2008; Bass, 1981). Pincus and DeBonis (2004) contended that leadership is at its heart a communication process because it seeks to strengthen human relationships by increasing trust and understanding. This definition of leadership as communication is shared by leading organizational communication textbooks (Conrad & Poole, 2002; Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004; O'Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon, 2002; Shockley-Zalabak, 2002).

Batenburg & Smal (1997) measured second- and third-year medical students' attitudes towards patients, illness and care at three time points to measure attitude change during and after a communication skills teaching intervention. Participants' attitudes were measured: (1) just before the course; (2) just after the course; and (3) six months after the course. The authors found that medical students' attitudes did not change substantially as a result of the communication skills teaching intervention, suggesting that students' attitudes towards patients, illness and care were very stable and considerable effort was needed to initiate a change in attitudes.

Despite the importance of communication skills, scholars have documented significant deficiencies in employees' communication skills (Bednar & Olney, 1987; Peterson, 1997). Business schools have been criticized for not adequately teaching the communication skills and competencies needed in today's service oriented, team-oriented, and decentralized environment (Maupin, 1993; Nellermoe, Weirich, & Reinstein, 1999; Pincus, Rayfield, & Ohl, 1994). Maes et al. (1997) noted that the five classical management

functions of planning, organizing, commanding, controlling, and coordinating, as developed by Fayol (1949), continue to be the managerial skills emphasized in business textbooks. These functions are highly dependent on effective communication skills. Nellermoe et al. (1999) found that in top accounting firms, 80% of work time is spent in communication. Peterson (1997) found oral communication, decision making, and leadership were the most important competencies evaluated in hiring decisions.

Moreover, the nature of class assignments may also give short shrift to the range of communication skills that are required by business leaders. Maes et al. (1997) noted that business course work often requires formal classroom presentations, but few courses require students to engage in other forms of communication, such as conducting meetings or resolving conflicts. This is so even though business professionals and business faculty similarly value such business communication competencies (Waner, 1995). Perhaps not surprisingly, Peterson (1997) surveyed 253 corporate recruiters and found that they were dissatisfied with the communication skills of potential hires. Kane's (1993) survey of MBA recruiters for *Fortune* 500 companies found that most assumed that graduates had requisite technical and managerial knowledge, so recruiters instead focused on communication skills as the primary criteria for differentiating among candidates. Recruiters' top three criteria for evaluating candidates applying for management positions were strong interpersonal skills, communication skills, and team-oriented skills (Kane, 1993). As Krapels and Davis (2000) argued, educators would help companies reduce their training costs by developing course activities to enhance students' communication skills.

In Jordanian universities, communication subject taught as a chapter through courses of classroom management and preschool classroom management. There are, sometimes, in different courses in these universities, lectures on the teacher-student relationship and factors influencing teacher-student communications.

In sum, the literature suggests that communication skills are becoming increasingly important for success in the contemporary workplace environment. Whereas educational schools have generally been slow to adapt their curricula to emphasize communication skills, employers as essential to managerial success increasingly recognize these skills.

There is little research-identifying students'-teachers' attitudes towards communication skills in educational colleges. This pilot study addressed the gap in the literature to measure attitudes towards communication skills among students in Jordanian public universities.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes toward communication skills among students'-teachers' in Jordanian public universities. A modified version of the Communication Skills Attitudes Scale (CSAS) (Rees, Sheard, & Davies, 2002) was administered.

Specifically, the following research questions guided this study:

- 1- What are the attitudes toward communication skills among students-teachers?
- 2- Are there significant mean differences in the positive and negative attitudes toward communication skills among students-teachers in relation to their GPA (less than 2, 2 and more), year level (sophomore, junior, and senior) and discipline (class teacher, childhood teacher)?

Methodology

Population and sample of study

The target population for the study included all students of educational sciences college and Queen Rania Childhood College enrolled in one of these college courses, as part of their degree program in the Hashemite University during the first semester of academic year 2008/2009. A purposive sample of four courses was chosen that taught communication subject as a chapter or a lecture during the semester. These courses were classroom management and preschool classroom management. 310 students were enrolled in these chosen courses, with a total of 289 students completed the survey with accepted response rate of 93%. The result sample included 81 students from Childhood College and 208 students from educational sciences college. Students were told that participation was voluntary, and assured that their responses were anonymous.

Instrumentation

The main instrument used in this study is based on the work of Rees, Sheard, & Davies (2002). The communication skills attitude scale (CSAS) used to collect information regarding student attitudes about communication skills training.

The (CSAS) consists of 26 items as shown in Table, 13 of which are written in the form of positive statements and 13 negative statements about communication skills learning. Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants also completed a demographic questionnaire, which included items on their GPA, and year level.

The positive attitude scale (PAS) score was obtained by adding the scores of items 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25 and the reversed score of item 22. The negative attitude scale (NAS) score was obtained by adding the scores of items 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 24, 26 and the reversed score of item 1. Both scales range from 13 to 65 with higher scores indicating stronger positive or negative attitudes. The internal consistency of the two subscales as measured by Cronbach's α were PAS = 0.873 and NAS= 0.805 (Rees, Sheard, & Davies, 2002).

| No. | Items |
|-----|---|
| 1 | In order to be a good teacher I must have good communication skills |
| 2 | I can't see the point in learning communication skills |
| 3 | Nobody is going to fail their teaching degree for having poor communication skills |
| 4 | Developing my communication skills is just as important as developing my knowledge of teaching |
| 5 | Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect students |
| 6 | I haven't got time to learn communication skills |
| 7 | Learning communication skills is interesting |
| 8 | I can't be bothered to turn up to sessions on communication skills |
| 9 | Learning communication skills has helped or will help facilitate my team-working skills |
| 10 | Learning communication skills has improved my ability to communicate with students |
| 11 | Communication skills teaching states the obvious and then complicates it |
| 12 | Learning communication skills is fun |
| 13 | Learning communication skills is too easy |
| 14 | Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect my colleagues |
| 15 | I find it difficult to trust information about communication skills given to me by non-teaching lecturers |
| 16 | Learning communication skills has helped or will help me recognise students' rights regarding |
| 17 | Communication skills teaching would have a better image if it sounded more like a science subject |
| 18 | When applying for education college, I thought it was a really good idea to learn communication skills |
| 19 | I don't need good communication skills to be a teacher |
| 20 | I find it hard to admit to having some problems with my communication skills |
| 21 | I think it's really useful learning communication skills on the education degree |
| 22 | My ability to pass exams will get me through education school rather than my ability to communicate |
| 23 | Learning communication skills is applicable to learning education |
| 24 | I find it difficult to take communication skills learning seriously |
| 25 | Learning communication skills is important because my ability to communicate is a lifelong skill |
| 26 | Communication skills learning should be left to psychology students, not educational students |

Table 1: Communication Skills Attitudes Scale (CSAS)

Instrument Translation Process

To ensure equivalence of meaning of the items and constructs between the Arabic and English versions of the CSAS, a rigorous translation process was used that included forward and backward translation, subjective evaluations of the translated items, and pilot testing. The goal of the translation process was to produce an Arabic version of the CSAS with items that were equivalent in meaning to the original English version. The Arabic version of the CSAS was then pilot tested with a group of 35 students to collect feedback about instrument content and usage. The feedback from students emphasized that the instrument has both face and content validity.

Instrument Standardization

The Arabic version of the CSAS was tested with a sample of 35 students different than that of the study but withdrawn from the same population (the Hashemite University students). Reliability coefficients for the CSAS established for the PAS and NAS scales as follows: PAS (.87), and NAS (.81). Based on the translation process and the reliability estimates, the Arabic-translated version of the CSAS seemed to be valid and reliable measure for use with a Jordanian population.

Data Collection

With the permission of the instructor, the questionnaire was administered to students during regular class periods during the first semester of academic year 2008/2009. The students received written instructions that specified the purpose of the study and explained the procedures to be followed in responding to the items. They were told that there was no right or wrong responses. Students were asked to return the survey to the class instructor who in turn returned it to the researchers. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. First, the data were coded. Second, respondents were asked to report their GPA, year level and then turned to the research questions posed in the study. Then descriptive statistics were used to identify the personal characteristics of the total sample students. The association of the dependent variables (PAS and NAS scores) with the independent variables (GPA and year level) was determined. Student's t-test, means and standard deviation and ANOVA were used with $p < 0.05$. SPSS version 10.0 was used for the statistical analysis.

The following explained the GPA system adopted in the university that participated in this study:- less than 2 = fail, 2.00-2.49 = accepted, 2.50-2.99 = good, 3.00-3.49 = very good, 3.50-4.00 = Excellent.

Results of the Study

1- What are the attitudes toward communication skills among students-teachers?

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the students' attitudes toward communication skills. The PAS had a mean score of 4.037, and the NAS had a mean of 3.636.

| | Mean | SD |
|--------------------|-------|------|
| Positive attitudes | 4.037 | .407 |
| Negative attitudes | 3.639 | .429 |

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the students' attitudes toward communication skills

2- Are there significant mean differences in the positive and negative attitudes toward communication skills among students-teachers in relation to their GPA (less than 2, 2 and more), year level (sophomore, junior, and senior) and discipline (class teacher, childhood teacher)?

t-tests for independent samples were used to examine the difference in means between students' disciplines (class teacher and childhood teachers'), and in means between GPA (less than 2, and 2 and more) in each of PAS and NAS. However, one-way analysis of variance was utilized to identify whether the variances of the three level of each students' years were equal or significantly different.

Table 3 shows that there were no significant differences at the 0.05 level between class teachers and childhood teachers students in the dimensions of PAS and NAS.

| Dimensions | Discipline | N | Means | SD | t | P |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| Positive Attitudes Scale | Class teachers | 208 | 4.020 | .390 | -.411 | .679 |
| | Childhood teachers | 81 | 4.043 | .413 | | |
| Negative Attitudes Scale | Class teachers | 208 | 3.645 | .390 | .139 | .889 |
| | Childhood teachers | 81 | 3.637 | .443 | | |

Table 3: The difference between class teachers and childhood teachers regarding to their PAS and NAS

Regarding the significant differences between students whose GPA less than 2 and students whose GPA 2 and more, table 4 reports that there were no significant differences at the (0.05) level in NAS ($p = .143$). However, there were significant differences at the (0.05) level in PAS ($p = .047$). Students who are GPA 2 and more perceived their PAS as more than students who are GPA less than 2.

| Dimensions | GPA | N | Means | SD | T | P |
|--------------------------|------------|-----|-------|------|--------|-------|
| Positive Attitudes Scale | Less 2 | 49 | 3.863 | .489 | -1.998 | .047* |
| | 2 and more | 240 | 4.050 | .399 | | |
| Negative Attitudes Scale | Less 2 | 49 | 3.775 | .397 | 1.468 | .143 |
| | 2 and more | 240 | 3.629 | .431 | | |

* $p < 0,05$

Table 4: The difference between students in each dimension of LSP scale regarding to their GPA (less 2, 2 and more)

On the other hand, utilizing two-way analysis of variance, as can be observed in table 5, shows that there were significant differences among the three years level groups (sophomore, junior, and senior) in each of PAS and NAS. In other words, there were significant differences among the three years level groups (sophomore, junior, and senior) in the dimension of PAS ($F = 13.02$, $p = 0.00$), and NAS ($F = 14.36$, $p = 0.00$).

| Dimensions | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | P |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Positive Attitudes Scale | Between groups | 3.990 | 2 | 1.995 | 13.026 | .000* |
| | Within groups | 43.798 | 286 | .153 | | |
| | Total | 47.788 | 288 | | | |
| Negative Attitudes Scale | Between groups | 4.844 | 2 | 2.422 | 14.361 | .000* |
| | Within groups | 48.237 | 286 | .169 | | |
| | Total | 53.082 | 288 | | | |

* $p < 0,05$

Table 5: The difference between sophomore, junior, and senior students in each dimension of PAS and NAS

To assess pairwise differences among the levels of years for *students* attitudes toward communication skills, the Fischers LSD procedures ($p = .05$) was performed (Table 6).

| Dependent Variable | (I) YEARS | (J) YEARS | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|------------|-------|
| Positive Attitudes Scale | sophomore | Junior | -.129 | .054 | .019* |
| | | Senior | .174 | .056 | .002* |
| | Junior | sophomore | .129 | .054 | .019* |
| | | Senior | .303 | .059 | .000* |
| | Senior | sophomore | -.174 | .056 | .002* |
| | | Junior | -.303 | .059 | .000* |
| Negative Attitudes Scale | sophomore | Junior | -.292 | .057 | .000* |
| | | Senior | -.221 | .059 | .000* |
| | Junior | sophomore | .292 | .057 | .000* |
| | | Senior | .070 | .062 | .260 |
| | Senior | sophomore | .221 | .059 | .000* |
| | | Junior | -.070 | .062 | .000* |

*p<0,05

Table 6: Fischers LSD Multiple Comparisons for students' attitudes toward communication skills (PAS and NAS) regarding their year level.

The results in Table 6 indicate that senior students positive attitudes toward communication skills (M = 4.172) differ significantly from sophomore (M = 4.043) at p = .002, and junior (M = 37.46) at p = .019. This means that senior students have more PAS level than other sophomore and junior students do.

Regarding sophomore students negative attitudes toward communication skills (M = 3.77) differ significantly from senior (M = 3.70) at p = .00, and junior (M = 3.48) at p = .00. This means that sophomore students have more NAS level than other junior and senior students do.

| Dimensions | Years | N | Mean | SD |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----|-------|------|
| Positive Attitudes Scale | Sophomore | 114 | 4.043 | .460 |
| | Junior | 94 | 3.870 | .201 |
| | Senior | 81 | 4.172 | .449 |
| | Total | 289 | 4.037 | .407 |
| Negative Attitudes Scale | Sophomore | 114 | 3.773 | .509 |
| | Junior | 94 | 3.482 | .168 |
| | Senior | 81 | 3.703 | .451 |
| | Total | 289 | 3.639 | .429 |

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations for the students' level of year PAS and NAS

Discussion and Recommendations of the Study

Results of study reveals that there were no significant differences between class teachers and childhood teachers students in their positive and negative attitudes toward communication skills. It may explained by that there are no formal training sessions in communication skills during programs of class teachers and childhood teachers' preparation. Or the lesser number of childhood teacher students' in this study may have been partly responsible for the lack of a significant difference.

Results of study shows that there were significant differences among participants with grade point averages 2 and more and students with GPA less than 2 in their positive attitudes toward communication skills. Students with grade point averages 2 and more have positive Attitudes toward communication skills than students with grade point average less than 2. At the same time students with grade point averages 2 and more have attitudes toward communication skills than students with grade point average less than 2. This result may interpreted as North and Worth (2004) study found that interpersonal skills and basic

communication skills including speaking, listening, reading and writing implemented among students with GPA 2 and more higher than students with GPA less than 2.

The study reveals that senior students have high positive attitudes toward communication skills than sophomore and junior. This result agrees with a previous study suggested that older, mature students have high positive attitudes toward communication skills training (Rees & Garrud, 2001). At the same time sophomore students have high negative attitudes toward communication skills than senior and junior students.

Practical Implications

Based upon findings from the study, the following suggestions that may useful to students and faculty members. We believe the suggestions help set the stage for a good communication environment, allowing students to communicate and learn more effectively:

The training sessions should be made, and should be more interesting and the importance of communication skills for a future educational career should be emphasized. Self-assessment of student skill levels should be encouraged. Class and childhood teachers, as well as social and behavioral scientists can be involved in training during the basic science years.

Evaluate students for physical or emotional problems that deter communicating. Effective communication by students in today's classroom is partially dependent upon the teacher being aware of physical or emotional problems experienced by the students. For example, a simple change in the seating arrangement might do wonders for a student with a hearing loss. Without teacher intervention, many physical and emotional problems make good communication difficult for students.

Research Implications

Material procured by this study may use to advance further studies involving the communication skills of future undergraduate students with teacher-education majors and childhood education major. This study could ignite a great interest in the specific communication skills of students and possibly develop an urgency of departmental testing of specific communication skills of all students involved in the College of Educational Sciences and Queen Rania Childhood College at Hashemite University. This could ensure an increase in total educational assessment of students, thus serving as information to improve learning. Use the information delivered from the Communication Attitude Scale to develop a more precise testing instrument specifically targeting teacher-education students, thus aiding in the improvement of teaching effectiveness in today's classroom.

Recommendations

The following recommendations made based on the findings, and observations made by the researcher: Additional studies should undertaken on larger and more diverse populations to further validate the outcomes. In-service teachers should be introduced to the *Attitudes toward communication skills*. The results of the *attitudes toward communication skills* can use to better prepare teachers and their students for their classroom environment and increasing effective communication. Further studies across different semesters and in

other educational colleges are required to gain an insight into the problems of communication skills training in Jordan.

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